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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000733

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL LEADERS MEETING ENDS WITHOUT AGREEMENT  
ON DATE FOR FIRST COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES SESSION

REF: BAGHDAD 725

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for  
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: At the close of the day March 7, it appeared that the Shia Islamists were resisting the Talabani call to convene the Council of Representatives March 12. List 555 independent Sami al-Askari told us March 7 that Deputy President Abd al-Mahdi's refusal to sign the convocation with President Talabani would delay the opening session. However, Kurdish and Sunni Arab leaders reportedly were still pressing for this date. Abd al-Mahdi told the Ambassador March 7 that he thought ultimately Shia hardline cleric Moqtada as-Sadr would keep backing Jafari and hence make his removal harder. Abd al-Mahdi thought the Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) would make a decision about whether or not to keep Jafari within the next several days. List 555 independent Qassem Daoud also thought Sadr would maintain his support for Jafari. He doubted Coalition member party SCIRI would quit the Coalition to join the Kurds, Sunni Arab Tawafuq Front and Allawi in a common front unless Ayatollah Sistani pledged not to criticize SCIRI for breaking the unity of the List 555 group. END SUMMARY.

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Differing Opinions Over CoR Opening Session  
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12. (C) Following the conclusion of the Talabani-hosted meeting of political leaders (reftel), Saifadeen Abd al-Rahman told PolOff the evening of March 7 that the Shia coalition was continuing to push hard to delay the first session of the Council of Representatives. However, Abd al-Rahman said that the Kurds and Sunni Arabs would continue to advocate holding the first session on March 12, the date called for by President Talabani.

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SCIRI's Abd al-Mahdi on Jafari and Sadr  
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13. (C) Deputy President Adil Abd al-Mahdi opined to the Ambassador March 7 that hardline Shia cleric Moqtada as-Sadr was being cagey about whether he would support Jafari staying as prime minister. He said that SCIRI leader al-Hakim had sent his son Muhsin to see Sadr earlier this week. When Muhsin asked the question directly, Sadr avoided a response. Abd al-Mahdi concluded that he thought Sadr would hold fast to Jafari. Abd al-Mahdi said he was not sure how the List 555 would decide on keeping Jafari or not; it might be a leadership consensus decision or it might come to a vote within the

List 555. He thought a decision would come down within days. The Ambassador underlined that a decision needs to be made quickly - Iraq needs a government urgently. He also underlined U.S. problems with Jafari.

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Shia Independent Doubts SCIRI Will Jump  
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14. (C) On March 7, Shia independent Qassem Daoud informed us that he believes Ja'afari is unlikely to step down. He noted that Moqtada al-Sadr appears to supporting Ja'afari's nomination. Daoud commented that Jafari is having government-owned al-Iraqiya TV highlight Sadr-related stories. (Comment: Adil Abd al-Mahdi said the same to the Ambassador March 7. End Comment.)

15. (C) Daoud claimed that SCIRI would not split from the main Shia Coalition over Jafari. Ayatollah Sistani is committed to the unity of the Shia Coalition. Daoud said he is urging the Najaf clerics to pledge they will not criticize parties like SCIRI if they quit the Coalition over Jafari. He said that he is not encouraged so far. He was dubious that SCIRI would take the risk without having assurances.

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Another Shia Independent Backs Jafari Still  
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16. (C) Independent Sadrist/Jafari-leaning List 555 parliamentarian Sami al-Askari told us March 7 that the parliament would not hold its first session on March 12 because Deputy President Adel Abd al-Mahdi would not add

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his signature to President Jalal Talabani's order. Al-Askari then argued that editorials in the New York Times and the Washington Post criticizing Prime Minister Jafari resulted from a USG campaign to discredit Jafari. PolOffs vigorously denied this, saying the USG would work with any Prime Minister the Iraqis chose. Al-Askari added that the Kurds would not support Jafari's nomination because of President Talabani, and because Jafari does not support Kurdish aspirations to control Kirkuk.  
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